

FEBRUARY 14, 2005

SPECIAL 28th  
ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

# IN THESE TIMES

## The Fight for Our Future

Labor's Dramatic  
Plans to Combat  
Corporate Power

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# Contents

## Volume 29 - Numbers 5 & 6

### **The Fight for the Future** By Christopher Hayes

**14** As union membership continues to dwindle, a debate is raging on how to make labor a force again.

### **High-Tech Hijack** By David Moberg

**22** Remember all of those wonderful IT jobs you were promised? Well, they're going overseas.

### **The Falling Dollar** By Dean Baker

**28** The dollar's crash will be painful, but the sooner it comes, the better.

### **Camel Nights** By Michelle Tea

**32** Humping smokes to make the rent in a self-righteous world.

### **11 Viewpoint** By Robert Parry

Bush's death squads.

### **12 House Call** By Rep. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.)

Ground control to Mr. Bush.

### **13 Back Talk** By Susan Douglas

The media's global blinders.

### **6 Mad Cows and Americans** By John Stauber

Nightmare scenario: A fatal human dementia spread through kissing.

### **8 A Healthy Choice**

By Hans Johnson

A movement builds to take on Wal-Mart.

### **9 Appallo-O-Meter**

By Dave Mulcahey

### **10 In Person** By Joel Patenaude

Navy SEALs sue the messenger.



### **42 • Gay Matrimony: Get Used to It**

By Allison Xantha Miller

**BOOKS** Marriage, assimilation and radicalism in the gay community.

### **44 • Copywrongs** By Pat Aufderheide

**MEDIA** How copyright law clamps down on the imagination.

### **47 • 1844 A.D.** By Kurt Vonnegut

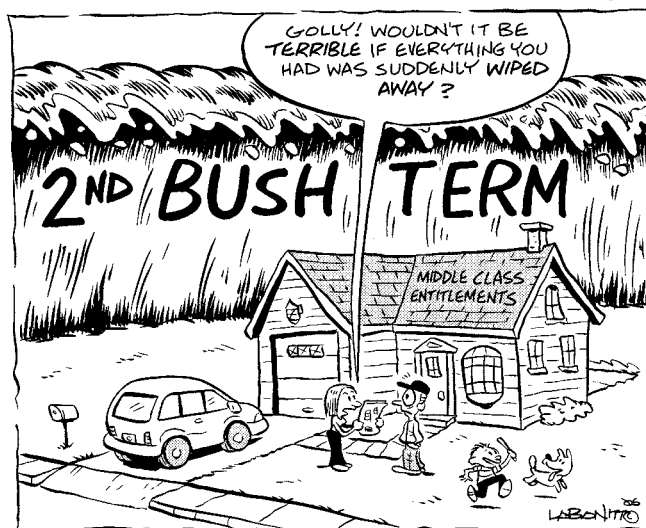
**POETRY** An ode to religion and other opiates.

Cover by Jim Rinnert



“Get some devastation in the back.

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER BILL FRIST (R-TENN.), TO A PHOTOGRAPHER TAKING A PICTURE OF HIM BEFORE HE LEFT TSUNAMI-STRIKEN SRI LANKA, AS QUOTED BY THE AP.



# Editorial

## Labor's Future Is Ours By Jeff Epton

Organized labor is the oldest, largest and most successful social movement in the United States. Organized labor has been the wave that lifted

all boats, leading the way to retirement with dignity, 40-hour workweeks, two-day weekends, extra pay for overtime and access to quality healthcare for working people. Today, organized labor is still the best-funded and organized progressive force in the country. Its agenda serves broad social interests—guaranteeing workers' rights to organize and influence workplace conditions, defending Social Security, promoting a living wage for all working people and creating a universal system of quality healthcare.

Organized labor is also in decline. Once representing one out of every three workers, it now enrolls about 13 percent of all workers. It operates in a hostile political environment, unable to match the influence that corporations exert on federal and state governments. It increasingly is confined to representing public employees and workers in a few shrinking industrial sectors. It is plagued by corruption and anti-democratic practices. And, purged of its social-movement emphasis since the McCarthy era, it primarily practices a kind of member-service unionism at the expense of a broader worker agenda.

This constellation of strengths and weaknesses fuels the debate within and outside of the AFL-CIO that Christopher Hayes

outlines on page 14. As Hayes writes, a handful of larger unions, including the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and UNITE/HERE (a merged union representing needletrade workers and hotel and restaurant employees), have challenged the AFL-CIO to reorganize. Their proposal has stimulated the most engaged discussion of labor's future in a generation. But the controversy has not sparked an interest in all progressive circles.

I asked a leader of United for Peace and Justice, a coalition formed to oppose the war in Iraq, if their organization had any interest in the outcome of the debate within organized labor. "No," she said. "Labor represents less than 13 percent of workers. Their internal debates don't affect us."

But they do. For 28 years, *In These Times* has been reporting on the political efforts of peace groups, environmentalists, feminists, civil rights organizations and others. There have been victories during that time, but what stands out in many of these struggles is that groups too often fight alone, fight locally, and fight without a connection to an energized and inclusive movement.

The proportion of the workforce represented by organized labor has shrunk, but unions still represent 16 million public- and private-sector workers, many of whom

engage in progressive political action. The labor movement's leadership is changing and now includes women, people of color and low-income workers in numbers that other movements can't match.

Unions remain a force to be reckoned with. If the AFL-CIO's debate about its future direction leads to a revival of organized labor, that would be a first step in reviving a progressive movement in the United States. A reinvigorated labor movement, with inclusive leadership and an expanding membership base, would boost the efforts of progressives everywhere. It could help us move beyond the current situation of isolated struggles—small groups of activists and coalitions defending past victories and scratching for small changes.

A historical fact: When unions have been strong, other social movements make gains too. It is time for all progressives, and Democrats, to recognize this.

Corporate America and the Republican Party have forged a partnership that currently decrees the contours of our economic and cultural life. If progressives ever want to counter this corporate hegemony, they must learn from the past and embrace the strength and potential of the union movement. For their part, labor leaders must refocus on their original mission—to build solidarity among all workers, to play a leading role in defining the conditions of work and to organize the unorganized.

We have no choice but to care about the future of labor. Its future is our own. ■

# Letters

## A Stolen Election?

You have some misinformation in "Was the 2004 Election Stolen?" by Joel Bleifuss (January 3). Bleifuss stated that "in Ohio, more than 35 counties used Diebold machines" in the November 2 election. Ohio decided earlier in 2004 that there was not adequate time to implement new voting systems prior to the election. If you read our announcement to which I believe you're referring (which is nearly a year old), it states that "half of the 71 Ohio counties eligible to select an electronic voting system provider have preliminarily chosen Diebold Election Systems." To date, these systems have not been installed.

Also, on June 2, 2004, Diebold's board of directors authorized a change to the company's corporate eth-

ics policy to address the importance of the issue of political bias. In recognition of the necessity for strict neutrality concerning political candidates and issues, the chief executive officer, president, and chief financial officer of Diebold Inc. and those Diebold Inc. executives identified by the company as responsible for the oversight of its election systems companies, as well as all employees of those companies, may not make contributions to, directly or indirectly, any political candidate, party, election issue or cause, nor participate in any political activities, except for voting.

Mike Jacobsen  
Director, Global Communications  
Diebold Inc.  
North Canton, Ohio



Joel Bleifuss' discussion of the consistent discrepancy between exit polls and official vote totals in 10 battleground states, in which exit polls showed a higher Kerry vote than the official total, is based on a serious misunderstanding of the "random error" factor. Statistics allow us to compute the chances of a random sample differing from the total population by a given amount, for a given size of sample. But that is for a random, or probability sample. If a series of random samples of exiting voters differs systematically from the official total in a consistent manner, then the official total is suspect. But exit polls are not strictly random samples—they depend on the cooperation of the exiting voters. If Bush voters were generally a little less cooperative with the exit poll—that is, they walked out without giving an interview—that would produce the

consistent difference between exit polls and official results.

The chances of this happening are not "1 in 1000" let alone "250 million to one" as dramatically stated in the article, but in fact highly likely, given the anti-media and anti-social-science attitudes of many Republicans.

Allen Barton  
Chapel Hill, N.C.

## JOEL BLEIFUSS RESPONDS

Yes, if Bush voters were less likely to agree to be interviewed, that could account for the discrepancy in the exit polls. But where is the evidence that this is the case? Steven F. Freeman, whose work I cite in "The First Stone," has put it this way: "It's an empirical question (i.e., it's a question that must be answered with data, not speculation). To say Republicans must have refused to participate more than Democrats explains nothing; rather, it dismisses a legitimate inquiry. The fact that the count deviates from the exit poll does not by itself mean it is apparent that 'Kerry voters were much more willing to participate in the exit poll than Bush voters,'" as Senior Gallup Poll Editor David W. Moore has claimed.

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## Catch up with Thomas Frank

Emily Udel interviewed Tom Frank, author of the best selling *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, for "Fire on the Prairie," *In These Times*' radio show. Check out the transcript of the interview, "Recapturing Kansas" on our Web site or listen to the audio at [www.fireontheprairie.com](http://www.fireontheprairie.com).

## Noam Chomsky's Latest

Signed, first edition copies of Noam Chomsky's most recent book, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance*, are for sale at our newly redesigned Web store. Pick yours up at [www.inthesetimes.com/store](http://www.inthesetimes.com/store).

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## In Sophomoric Times

I know all the words in Brian Cook's editorial and use them myself from time to time, but they don't belong in a magazine that wishes to be taken seriously by the adult world ("Souls for Sale," January 3). His personal, scatological, and frankly sophomoric attack on Tom DeLay degrades *In These Times* and all of its thoughtful writers and readers. *In These Times* probably gets one bite, but I wouldn't count on tolerance for a second.

By the way, Dave Mulcahey's mention of someone's "ass load" of money in the "Appall-O-Meter" is of a piece with the Cook editorial though fortunately minus the vitriol. Could it be that I'm simply in the wrong demographic and that, after all these years together, *In These Times* wants to take up with someone much much younger?

Barbara Clark  
Walla Walla, Wash.

## Mapless and Clueless

Coco Fusco seems lost in a spaceless world ("Questioning the Frame," January 3). "Viewing the world as a map eliminates time...and dehumanizes life," she writes, as if the world of texts has not served that purpose down through the centuries with notorious

efficiency. Maps can portray history with an element of reality lost in the printed world. Without maps, history seems to occur in a vacuum. Maps can locate for us the sites and extent of social problems. Maps can show us the extent of imperialism. The information maps provide and the purposes they serve are determined by those who commission their creation.

As a progressive, I'd be lost without historical atlases as I read my history books and without current maps to accompany current news. Maps properly composed yield information about the activities of human beings in a realistic manner beyond what statistical tables and pages of text can.

Too many who oppose the establishment know very little history and even less geography. They know not where they are going because they don't know where they are coming from. Mapless, they have no realistic idea of where in the world they are.

Laurence G. Wolf  
Cincinnati, Ohio

## Who's the Attila?

James Schamus' "Blocking Mr. Torture" (January 3) was timely and important and I hope the Democrats in the Senate will read it and vehemently disagree with Sen. Patrick Leahy's (D-Vt.) plan

to support Alberto Gonzales' nomination for attorney general.

Leahy said Gonzales was "not Attila the Hun" but failed to note Gonzales is merely the general counsel for the modern-day Attila the Hun. The fifth century Attila the Hun, known for his unprovoked attacks and wars, chose mostly to do battle with weak kingdoms. Who is to say that one of his counselors (substitute chief counsel here) was not responsible for advising Attila to undertake such actions?

G. M. Chandu  
Flushing, N.Y.

## We Try

I have been very impressed by the way you cover the Middle East. I have spent years of active service posted in different Arab countries—Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq and most recently Syria. It is difficult to understand the Middle East today, and I appreciate your efforts.

Christo Petrov  
Sofia, Bulgaria

## Correction

An incorrect URL was provided for the Social Security Trustees' Report in "Cutting Our Benefits" (January 3). The correct URL is [www.socialsecurity.gov/OACT/TR](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/OACT/TR).

# IN THESE TIMES

"With liberty and justice for all..."

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## Mad Cows and Americans

**Lax testing standards for North American cattle could be masking a wider contagion.** *By John Stauber*

**O**N JANUARY 2, CANADIAN OFFICIALS ANNOUNCED that an Alberta dairy cow had tested positive for mad cow disease—the third time a North American bovine has been diagnosed with the neurological disease.

Most Canadians and Americans believe that their governments have taken the necessary measures to stop the spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), the scientific name for mad cow disease. For a decade the official line of both governments and the corporate meat and livestock industry has been that the disease could not occur in either country because of extensive safeguards such as the “1997 firewall feed ban” that officials claimed prevented the feeding of cattle protein to cattle, the means of infection for the deadly brain disease.

However, the regulations adopted by the United States and Canada in 1997 were too little and too late. For ex-

ample, it is still legal in both countries to wean calves on formula containing cattle blood as a protein source.

Why have only three mad cows been discovered to date in North America? Both Canada and the United States have increased the number of cattle tested by each government for the disease, but the testing remains woefully inadequate by the standards of the European Union nations and Japan.

Of the 36 million cattle slaughtered in 2004 and put into the human and animal food supply, only 176,468 were tested. In at least three instances U.S. cattle have tested as possibly having mad cow disease on sophisticated “quick tests,” but further testing has led the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to announce the results to be negative. However, the government testing is secretive and suspect. No independent scientists or laboratories have reviewed or confirmed any of the suspected mad cows. Each time



the USDA has announced a suspect cow the cattle futures market has been thrown into temporary turmoil, and the industry is pressuring the government to stop announcing suspect animals altogether.

It was private mad cow testing that eventually revealed the presence of the disease in Germany. So it is not surprising that when the Kansas-based Creekstone Farms Premium Beef company reached an agreement with Japan to sell beef that the company had tested to the Japanese, the USDA, invoking a 1913 law, warned that mad cow testing by private U.S. firms is illegal. Creekstone hoped to save hundreds of company jobs by testing its cattle and reopening its market with Japan.

The first rule of public relations in a crisis is to “manage the outrage.” The December 23, 2003, announcement of a mad cow in the United States resulted in a media feeding frenzy, but a well-prepared and coordinated USDA and industry PR campaign tamed it within weeks. Since then the media has primarily echoed soothing assurances by the secretary of agriculture and various industry-funded third-party voices such as the brilliantly named Harvard Center for Risk Analysis. Consequently, most Americans think that the necessary protective measures against mad cow disease have been taken, and there is not the public outcry, such as the one that took place in Europe, which might force the U.S. government to follow Europe’s lead and institute a total feed ban on feeding livestock to livestock, along with extensive animal testing.

As mysterious a killer as mad cow disease and its human equivalent, Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) are, the steps needed to fix the problem are simple and straightforward. The disease is spread via an infectious protein dubbed a “prion” by U.S. Nobel Prize winner Stanley Prusiner. When infectious animals are fed to people and livestock, mad cow disease can be transmitted. Banning the feeding of livestock to livestock is the solution, but that deprives the livestock industry of a method to turn a waste product—slaughterhouse offal—into a valuable resource: livestock protein and fat supplements.

Had the United States heeded experts and implemented a British-style ban on feeding livestock to livestock, and tightened the ban further in 1996 when humans began dying, the mad cow crisis in the United States could have been averted. Instead, we now have mad cow

disease in North America, calves in the United States and Canada weaned on cattle blood, and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) quietly reviewing the mysterious deaths of young Americans from sporadic CJD to see if the cause of death might be eating U.S. mad cows.

Sporadic CJD is supposedly an exceedingly rare disease that kills, according to the CDC, maybe one in a million people. Reports of CJD deaths among people in their 20s, 30s and 40s have surfaced in the past five years in California, Utah, Oklahoma, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, New Jersey, Texas and other states. With a mad cow-type disease infecting U.S. deer, called chronic wasting disease, and U.S. sheep long infected with scrapie (the ovine form of mad cow disease), suspicions are growing that these diseases might be moving into the human populations. Yet, most human dementia deaths are not autopsied, and there is no nationwide requirement for mandatory reporting or investigation of CJD deaths.

Mad cow disease was never seen before 1985. It was not confirmed that humans were dying of it until 1996. No human mad cow disease spread through blood transfusions was documented until 2003, the same year that the first two cases of mad cows were confirmed in North America.

One of the biggest mysteries of these related diseases is the existence of different strains, and the way new strains emerge when one strain moves into a new host, as happens in laboratory tests or when a so-called species barrier is jumped via the consumption of contaminated feed or an infected animal.

A worst-case scenario can be imagined, and should inform the actions of governments. For example, mad cow disease does not appear to spread from animal to animal. But the equivalent disease in North American deer and elk, chronic wasting disease, does appear to be horizontally infectious. One deer can apparently infect another through saliva or feces. The nightmare: the emergence of a fatal human dementia spread through kissing. ■

**JOHN STAUBER** is the founder and executive director of the nonprofit Center for Media and Democracy, [www.prwatch.org](http://www.prwatch.org), in Madison, Wisconsin. He is the co-author with Sheldon Rampton of *Weapons of Mass Deception: The Uses of Propaganda in Bush’s War on Iraq (2003)* and *Mad Cow USA (1997)*.

## IN SHORT



### Gulag Archipelago

On January 6, the Pentagon announced it would launch a new investigation into prisoner abuse at Guantánamo Bay. The investigation, to be led by Brigadier General John Furlow, follows the ACLU’s release of documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act that detail FBI eyewitness accounts of abuse. The memos illustrate a growing rift between FBI interrogation practices and those used by the military, which ACLU Executive Director Anthony Romero said “can only be described as torture.”

According to the report, anonymous FBI agents witnessed regular strangulations, beatings and the placing of lit cigarettes inside the ears of prisoners. According to one document, detainees were handcuffed in fetal positions for up to 24 hours at a time and left to defecate on themselves. Another document described a detainee wrapped in an Israeli flag and subjected to loud music. Other agents complained that the military impersonated FBI agents in order to evade prosecution in the event of an inquiry.

Perhaps the most controversial of these documents is an FBI e-mail referring to an executive order by President Bush authorizing interrogation methods “beyond the bounds of standard FBI practice.” These methods included “sensory deprivation through the use of hoods,” stress positions such as “half squats,” and military dogs. Since the ACLU published the memos, however, both the White House and the FBI have denied the existence of any such order.

Furlow’s investigation will be the eighth major military investigation into allegations of prisoner abuse in the last two years. In spite of these investigations, “key pieces of this grim puzzle are still missing” said ACLU attorney Jameel Jaffer, who added that future lawsuits to ensure that relevant documents are released appear “increasingly likely.”

—Stephen Kovach

# APPALL-O-METER

## 3.8 Is Sweden the New France?

"Thank God for Tsunami and 2,000 dead Swedes!!!" This message of joy and thanksgiving appears in a flier circulated by the folks at Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas. You may recall this congregation's inimitable pastor, the Rev. Fred Phelps, originator of "God Hates Fags" and other quasi-scrip-tural catchphrases.

According to the Westboro cosmology, Sweden—a.k.a. "The Land of the Sodomite Damned"—has pissed off the Lord mightily by convicting a Pentecostal clergyman who delivered a stem-winding sermon against gays and lesbians. The recent tsunami was only a foretaste of the divine retribution in store for these herring-eating welfare-state monkeys if they don't get right with Jesus. "How many tsunami-dead Swedes are fags and dykes vacationing on their fat expendable incomes without kids to bother with and spend money on?" the flier asks.

Is this a sign that Sweden is joining France as a lightning rod of winger outrage? Perhaps. Interestingly, Rev. Fred was so happy with the Nordic body count that he forgot to mention the thousands of dirty, rotten Muslim infidels who also got swept out to sea.

## 1.6 Jesus in Furs?

Only God knows why, but scientists at Oxford University's Center for Science of the Mind plan to conduct experiments to see whether people of religious faith are able to withstand the pain of torture better than their secular humanist brethren.

According to the BBC, subjects will be burnt—not with actual flame but with a chili-infused gel and a heat pad—and their responses measured by brain scans. During their ordeal, the faithful will be allowed to gaze upon images of mystical devotion, such as crucifixes and statues of the Virgin Mary.

The mission of the center, which is run by a person called Baroness Greenfield, is not, as you might infer, to plumb new depths of upper-class

English kink, but to discover if prayer helps the brain release pain-killing endorphins during times of physical extremity.

## 1.5 Jesus in Diapers

When will our artist-rebels learn the lesson of "Piss Christ"? Which is that there is little point (artistically speaking) to sacrilege, blasphemy and iconoclasm in an age when these acts are no longer punishable. There are publicity advantages, however, both to the artist and to the Christian decency leaguers who welcome these outrages as divine providence. And the latter always get the better deal.

Britain is learning, in the wake of the BBC's decision to air "Jerry Springer—The Opera," just how annoying these culture war skirmishes can be. The program, aired on a recent Saturday night, featured Jesus in a diaper, admitting he was "a bit gay." Why? Who the hell knows, but a couple of British fundagelical organizations have grabbed a week's worth of headlines by threatening BBC executives and flooding the network with complaints. The Puritans have returned to the mother ship.

—Dave Mulcahey



# A Healthy Choice

## A movement builds to take on Wal-Mart. By Hans Johnson

UNTIL LAST YEAR, Wal-Mart, the global retail chain known for undercutting local competitors by curbing wages and benefits, enjoyed so much clout that it placed its sprawling warehouse stores practically at will. But grassroots challenges to the healthcare practices of America's largest employer have stalled its expansion bids, exposing a bullying streak beneath its homey veneer of red, white and blue.

The skirmishes feature charges that Wal-Mart racks up huge profits while covering health care for just 45 percent of its workers and freeloading on taxpayers, who are stuck with the tab for the uninsured and their family members. The conflict pits a wide alliance of interfaith, labor and community groups against a retail chain whose profits topped \$9 billion in 2003, with 3,200 outlets and 1.2 million employees in the United States alone.

In defending the very premise of the New Deal and reasserting the notion of a social contract, the campaign to rein in Wal-Mart could define the next decade of progressive organizing, policy and politics.

"The platform that Wal-Mart keeps advocating is bringing in jobs to low-income communities," says Rev. Michael Pfleger of St. Sabin's Catholic Church in Chicago. "But low-wage jobs, often without health care, keep families in poverty and keep people in shackles."

Pfleger marshaled a diverse coalition of ministers, small business owners and union activists that in May headed off Wal-Mart's drive to change zoning laws and open a mega-market on his city's South Side.

A Wal-Mart spokesman even had to refute charges that the company's wage and health policies are exploitative. "We are not the evil empire," he told *USA Today*. A majority of the aldermen were poised to block the proposal, and the bid was withdrawn.

At Wal-Mart, full-time workers have to endure six months—and part-timers, two years—before applying for health coverage through the company. Wal-Mart told the *New York Times* in November that about 77 percent of its employees are eligible for health coverage through the company plan. But since Wal-Mart saddles its staff with 33 percent premiums, the coverage often costs more than \$200 a month per worker to maintain—a steep price for workers making between \$8 and \$10 per hour. As a result, just 58 percent of those eligible, less than half of all workers, or about 537,000 people, actually have the insurance.

This compares with the complete coverage that became common for workers and their dependents after World War II. The rise of collectively bargained union contracts in the era of Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman gave rise to the notion of a so-called social contract. It stipulated that a worker receive livable wages and health benefits in return for loyal hard work.

Not all companies have torn up the social contract. Costco, a competitor in the large-scale retail business, provides insurance to more than 19 out of every 20 of its workers and pays more than 90 percent of the premium.

When Wal-Mart bows out on covering the healthcare costs of





**Wal-Mart:  
Lower prices,  
rising public  
healthcare costs?**

WILLIAM THOMAS CAIN / GETTY IMAGES

staff members, the public often picks up the tab. More than 10,000 Georgia children whose parents work at Wal-Mart are on a state health program, thus neatly passing on the \$10 million yearly expense to state residents. And in California, taxpayers are footing the bill for about \$32 million in healthcare costs from Wal-Mart workers that the employer would typically cover.

Such revelations are the latest black eye in a string of high-profile setbacks. In August, community activists along with union members involved in the Metropolitan Washington Council of the AFL-CIO discouraged Wal-Mart from plunking down a mammoth store in the city's northeast quadrant. Facing rising community hostility and the threat of bad publicity, Wal-Mart backed down.

The triumphs in Chicago and Washington follow an April victory near Los Angeles. By a two-to-one margin, voters in Inglewood rejected the retailer's bid to circumvent a zoning board and approve a superstore widely seen as disruptive to local businesses, traffic patterns, and the quality of life.

Wal-Mart has fought back, joining with California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in attacking a state ballot measure that would have mandated

either corporate coverage for workers or payments into a state plan. Opposed by half a million Wal-Mart dollars, Proposition 72 very narrowly failed on November 2.

Local coalitions and policy-makers remain keen to put some checks on the retail giant. "Wal-Mart executives chose to remove the responsibility from themselves," Mike Kreidler, former congressman and current state insurance commissioner for Washington state told the *New York Times*. He is working with state lawmakers to pass a measure similar to the California proposition.

Having succeeded in moving the debate about Wal-Mart beyond the public's almost religious fixation on low prices and into the realm of healthcare, activists are adhering to the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr's encouragement "to be wiser than our creed." Niebuhr, a mentor of Martin Luther King Jr., understood the danger of Americans being seduced into undermining their own way of life. Faced with a grave threat to healthcare, labor and community leaders are reasserting King's vision of a beloved community and rising to the occasion to create it. ■

**HANS JOHNSON** writes on religion and politics for *In These Times*.

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**“THOSE AP REPORTERS** who published those photos (and their apologists) are no better than street scum and deserve a hearty dose of street justice,”

writes “Boot Hill,” the pseudonym of a visitor to the right-wing chat room FreeRepublic.com. The reporter in question is Seth Hettena, a reporter for the Associated Press’ San Diego bureau.

What raised Boot Hill’s ire was a December 3 article detailing Hettena’s discovery of more than 40 photos that appear to show Navy SEALs cheerfully abusing Iraqi prisoners. Many of the images were date-stamped May 2003—months before even worse treatment of Iraqis took place at Abu Ghraib prison. Hettena found the pictures by using a simple Google keyword search, which led him to a Web site where the photos were posted by one of the soldiers’ wives.

Hettena’s report spoke volumes about why these photos of the SEALs’ “approved procedures” for “legitimate intelligence-gathering purposes” (as Navy Cmdr. Jeff Bender described the acts pictured) are not likely to win the United States new allies in its war on terror.

“These and other photos found by the AP appear to show the immediate aftermath of raids on civilian homes,” Hettena wrote. “A mug shot shows a man with an automatic weapon pointed at his head and a gloved thumb jabbed into his throat. In many photos, faces [of the captives] have been blacked out. What appears to be blood drips from the heads of some. A family huddles in a room in one photo, while others show debris and upturned furniture.”

Another photo—reposted by an approving FreeRepublic.com reader in late December (“I don’t know if this is one of them, but I love it!!!”)—showed a soldier grinning ear-to-ear and giving the thumbs-up while sitting between two bound and hooded Iraqi captives.

Instead of apologizing for these actions, the victimizers claimed victimhood. On December 28 a half-dozen Navy SEALs and two of their wives filed a civil lawsuit against Hettena and the AP. The SEALs seek unspecified damages and a court injunction against further use of the photos or identification of the commandos by the AP. The plaintiffs, none of whom are named in the lawsuit, claim the AP invaded their privacy and intentionally caused them emotional harm. Unmentioned is what became of the Iraqi prisoners or the extent of the harm done to them.

The plaintiffs’ lawyer claims the faces of most of the captive “insurgents and terrorists” photographed were

obscured by the SEALs out of “respect” for them—a courtesy the AP didn’t extend to the SEALs before transmitting the pictures. But, as the AP explained in a January 5 statement, the wire service doesn’t



Navy SEALs demonstrate “approved procedures” for “legitimate intelligence-gathering purposes.”

## Sue the Messenger

By Joel Patenaude

alter photos and “the expressions of the servicemen are a key part of the story.”

Due to the lawsuit and a directive from his editors and their lawyers, Hettena could not comment for this story. But Lucy Dalglish, executive director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, notes that all Hettena and the AP did was republish what was already publicly available. “There is no question [the AP] had a legal right” to transmit the photos for publication, Dalglish says. “Not in any way, shape or form was it an invasion of [the SEALs’] privacy.”

The Navy has so far distanced itself from the SEALs’ lawsuit, calling it a private matter. But if only to avoid further embarrassment or public scrutiny of the SEALs’ operations in Iraq, Dalglish says, “I wouldn’t be surprised if the military got involved” to encourage an out-of-court settlement. “This thing could get monumentally messy.”

An editorial in the *New York Post* said the SEALs “at the very least, deserve an apology” from the AP. But the tabloid got it backward. It’s the SEALs who owe their fellow servicemen and the American people an apology. Their acts have diminished all of us in the eyes of the world. ■

**JOEL PATENAUDE**  
is the editor of  
Silent Sports  
Magazine and a  
former colleague of  
Seth Hettena.



# Bush's Death Squads

**R**EFUSING TO ADMIT PERSONAL MISJUDGMENTS on Iraq, George W. Bush instead is pushing the United States toward becoming what might be called a permanent “counter-terrorist” state, which uses torture, cross-border death squads, and even collective punishments to defeat perceived enemies in Iraq and around the world.

Since securing a second term, Bush has pressed ahead with this hard-line strategy, in part by removing dissidents inside his administration while retaining or promoting his protégés.

As a centerpiece of this tougher strategy to pacify Iraq, Bush is contemplating the adoption of the brutal practices that were used to suppress leftist peasant uprisings in Central America in the '80s. The Pentagon is “intensively debating” a new policy for Iraq called the “Salvador option,” *Newsweek* magazine reported on January 9.

The strategy is named after the Reagan-Bush administration’s “still-secret strategy” of supporting El Salvador’s right-wing security forces, which operated clandestine “death squads” to eliminate both leftist guerrillas and their civilian sympathizers, *Newsweek* reported. “Many U.S. conservatives consider the policy to have been a success—despite the deaths of innocent civilians,” *Newsweek* wrote.

The magazine also noted that a number of Bush administration officials were leading figures in the Central American operations of the '80s, such as John Negroponte, who was then U.S. ambassador to Honduras and is now U.S. ambassador to Iraq.

Other current officials who played key roles in Central America include Elliott Abrams, who oversaw Central American policies at the State Department and who is now a Middle East adviser on Bush’s National Security Council staff, and Vice President Dick Cheney, who was a powerful defender of the Central American policies while a member of the House of Representatives.

The insurgencies in El Salvador and Guatemala were crushed through the slaughter of tens of thousands of civilians. In Guatemala, about 200,000 people perished, including what a truth commission later termed a genocide against Mayan Indians in the Guatemalan highlands. In El Salvador, about 70,000 died including massacres of whole villages, such as the slaughter carried out by a U.S.-trained battalion against hundreds of men, women and children in and around the town of El Mozote in 1981.

The Reagan-Bush strategy also had a domestic component, the so-called “perception management” opera-

tion. Administration propaganda justified U.S. actions in Central America by portraying the popular uprisings as an attempt by the Soviet Union to establish a beachhead in the Americas to threaten the U.S. southern border.

By employing the “Salvador option” in Iraq, the U.S. military would crank up the pain, especially in Sunni Muslim areas where resistance to the U.S. occupation of Iraq has been strongest. In effect, Bush would assign other Iraqi ethnic groups the job of leading the “death squad” campaign against the Sunnis.

“One Pentagon proposal would send Special Forces teams to advise, support and possibly train Iraqi squads, most likely hand-picked Kurdish Peshmerga fighters and Shiite militiamen, to target Sunni insurgents and their sympathizers, even across the border into Syria, according to military insiders familiar with discussions,” *Newsweek* reported.

*Newsweek* quoted one military source as saying, “The Sunni population is paying no price for the support it is giving to the terrorists. ... From their point of view, it is cost-free. We have to change that equation.”

The conditions in Central America and Iraq are not parallel, however.

In Central America, powerful oligarchies had long surrounded themselves with ruthless security forces and armies. So, when uprisings swept across the region in the early '80s, the Reagan-Bush administration had ready-made—though unsavory—allies who could do the dirty work with help from Washington.

A different dynamic exists in Iraq, because the Bush administration chose to disband rather than co-opt the Iraqi army. That left U.S. forces with few reliable local allies and put the onus for carrying out counter-insurgency operations on American soldiers who were unfamiliar with the land, the culture and the language.

Those problems, in turn, contributed to a series of counterproductive tactics, including the heavy-handed roundups of Iraqi suspects, the torturing of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and the killing of innocent civilians by jittery U.S. troops fearful of suicide bombings. The blame for these medieval tactics continues to climb the chain of command toward the Oval Office.

Bush finds himself facing a narrowing list of very tough choices. He could acknowledge his mistakes and seek international help in extricating U.S. forces from Iraq. But he abhors admitting errors, even small ones.

Instead Bush appears to be upping the ante, expanding the war by having Iraqi Kurds and Shiites kill Sunnis. This is a prescription for civil war or genocide. ■

‘The Sunni population is paying no price for the support it is giving to the terrorists. ... From their point of view, it is cost-free. We have to change that equation.’

**ROBERT PARRY** broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the '80s for the Associated Press and *Newsweek*. His new book, *Secrecy & Privilege: Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq, can be ordered at [secrecy-andprivilege.com](http://secrecy-andprivilege.com). A version of this article originally appeared on [Consortiumnews.com](http://Consortiumnews.com).*





## House Call *By Rep. Bernie Sanders*

# Ground Control to Mr. Bush

The time  
for playing  
nice with  
corporate  
outsourcers  
and their  
enablers in  
government  
is over.

*"There's a trade deficit. That's easy to resolve: People can buy more United States products if they're worried about the trade deficit."* —George W. Bush, December 15, 2004

**R**EMINISCENT OF THE CALLOUS "LET THEM EAT cake" reputedly uttered by Marie Antoinette on her way to the guillotine, President Bush's remarks show how out of touch he is with the economic reality most Americans face. Apparently, the president hasn't visited a shopping mall or Wal-Mart lately. If he had, like the millions of Americans who flocked to our nation's stores this holiday season to buy toys, bicycles, computers, sneakers, clothes, telephones, cowboy boots (yes, Mr. President, cowboy boots!), even artificial Christmas trees and decorations, he would surely know that an overwhelming majority of these products were made overseas, mostly in China.

Mr. President, did you buy an Xbox for your teenage relative this holiday season? If you tried purchasing one that was made in the United States, you're out of luck. According to Flextronics CEO Michael Marks, "We moved all of the production of Microsoft's Xbox consoles from Mexico to China."

Did Mrs. Bush buy you a pair of Ariat cowboy boots for Christmas? Well, guess what, Mr. President? Every last one: made in China.

As everyone knows from your accident last summer, you are an avid bicyclist. How about a sturdy mountain bike for Christmas? Oops, 85 percent of our bicycles are made in China.

As our commander in chief, you might be thinking about picking up some more rare-earth magnets for our military's smart bombs and cruise missiles. Well, guess what? Eighty percent of those magnets are made in China.

How about an American flag? Since 9/11, more than 10 million American flags were made in China.

Levi's Jeans? Sorry, they aren't made in the United States anymore either. Did your staff purchase Christmas decorations for the White House this year? Approximately 80 percent of these decorations are now made in China. (By the way, did you read about the so-called Christian "dissident" who was placed under house arrest in China because he wanted to have a party with his friends to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ?)

Mr. President, you may want to do your holiday shopping next year with former General Motors CEO Jack Smith. At least, he sounds like he's been out in the real world lately. "Walk around Wal-Mart," Mr. Smith says,

"and it looks as if everything is made in China." And he should know about Chinese imports. After all, General Motors is laying the groundwork for moving the U.S. auto industry abroad by purchasing \$4 billion in auto parts from China by 2009, up from \$200 million last year.

While the stark reality of America's industrial might moving abroad may have escaped the president and his economic advisers, a growing number of members of Congress see with their own eyes the devastating effect that the president's trade policy is having on manufacturing jobs in their own districts. It's high time that Congress brought the president down to earth, and made him understand that our current unfettered free trade policies have been a disaster for the working families of this country—and need a fundamental overhaul.

Today, the middle class in our country is shrinking, poverty is increasing, and the gap between the rich and the poor is growing wider. This year, the United States will have a record-breaking trade deficit of almost \$600 billion, including an estimated \$140 billion trade deficit with China. Over the last four years we have lost 2.7 million decent-paying manufacturing jobs—more than 16 percent of that sector. Many of those jobs have gone to China, a totalitarian society where workers are paid pennies an hour and have minimal rights. Meanwhile, most of the new jobs being created here are low wage with minimal benefits.

Amazingly, while the U.S. middle class declines, corporate America is helping make China the economic superpower of the 21st century. Not only is China rapidly becoming the manufacturing center of the world, it is quickly becoming the information technology hub as well (see "High-Tech Hijack," page 22). Andy Grove, the founder of Intel, predicted last year that the United States will lose the bulk of its information technology jobs to China and India over the next decade. These are some of the best-paying jobs available.

And John Chambers, the CEO of Cisco, is typical of many corporate leaders when he said: "China will become the IT center of the world, and we can have a healthy discussion about whether that's in 2020 or 2040. What we're trying to do is outline an entire strategy of becoming a Chinese company."

The time for playing nice with corporate outsourcers and their enablers in government is over. Congress must repeal Permanent Normal Trade Relations with China and develop trade policies that protect and create good-paying jobs in America. We must create a noise so loud that even the president hears it. ■

**BERNIE SANDERS,**  
Vermont Independent, is a member of the U.S. House of Representatives and author of legislation to repeal Permanent Normal Trade Relations with China.



# Tsunami Reveals News Gap

**S**ATELLITE PHOTOS OF COASTLINES ERADICATED, images of utterly bereft mothers who had lost their children, accounts of how people's daily lives halfway around the globe had been destroyed—all these brought out the best and the worst of the U.S. media. They also dramatized what we can learn, see and feel when the news media break out of their U.S.-centric mode and actually pay more detailed attention to the rest of the world. According to the Tyndall Report, ABC, CBS and NBC alone devoted 157 minutes to the tsunami story during the week of December 27-31, three times the coverage other big stories got in 2004.

On the one hand, of course, news outlets are only now providing us glimpses of life in Sri Lanka, Thailand and India because of this massive natural catastrophe; otherwise, according to standard journalistic routines, why pay attention to them? The countries Americans heard about in 2003-04 were Iraq, for obvious reasons, Britain, Afghanistan and Palestine. Most others remained invisible. In fact, as we all saw, the networks had to rely on home video footage at first because they have no bureaus in the region. And, as a result, we nearly always see the people of these countries (especially the women) as helpless victims.

On the other hand, much of the coverage has been deeply heartfelt, has vaulted over American ethnocentrism, and has brought to our attention groups of people and ways of living that U.S. journalism hardly ever shows us. The story has been a powerful reminder of the blinders our news media—especially TV news, including CNN—impose on our global vision.

The coverage has been the equivalent of going through the secret wardrobe in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, to reveal a teeming world of work, love, family and loss we never get to see. Some have argued that the Western media would never show images of white mothers embracing dead children, or of stacks of dead Western tourists being bulldozed into mass graves. But many of these images have not been objectifying; on the contrary, they have driven home the commonality of the human condition, despite enormous differences in wealth and culture.

Sadly, we already know what will happen. The relief efforts will continue, the headlines will become smaller and the window we had on this area of the world will close again.

The disaster was also the latest dramatic demon-

stration of the compassion gap at the rotten core of Team Bush. Not only did Bush immediately make Scrooge look like Albert Schweitzer with his initial, shameful offering of \$15 million for relief, he also showed himself to be completely out of touch with the instincts and self-conception of the American public. He fully expected the rest of the country to be as indifferent to and ignorant about the rest of the world as he is. As he remained silent and on vacation at his beloved ranch in Crawford, other horrified Americans began sending money to all kinds of relief organizations. His initial offering—the moral equivalent of offering a starving child a gum drop—was not only insulting to the international community, it was deeply embarrassing to Americans who see providing aid under such circumstances as central to, dare I say it, our moral values.

The *Guardian*, unlike our own august news outlets, quickly reminded its readers that the U.S. government has spent \$148 billion on the invasion of Iraq, and even when Bush the Grinch was forced to up the aid pledge to \$350 million, that was the equivalent of one and a half day's worth of spending in Iraq.

Of course, mean-spirited isolationism and mass ignorance are Team Bush's ultimate goals. This is the administration that has succeeded in cutting Pell Grants for lower-income college kids—they want people to be uneducated, credulous and uninformed. That's how they get away with selling everything from WMD in Iraq to a fake crisis in Social Security. Geographic ignorance is absolutely crucial to their success.

But for how much longer will the news media help them out? Coverage of international news on the networks has declined precipitously since the mid-'80s, from nearly 3800 minutes in 1989 to just over 1800 minutes in 1996 at ABC (the leader) and from 3350 minutes to 1175 minutes at NBC. In 1988, ABC featured 1158 foreign bureau reports; by 1996, that was down to 577 reports. Meanwhile, publications like *The Economist* and the *Financial Times* are enjoying increased circulation among business elites who need and want to know about international affairs.

As Diane Sawyer, Dan Rather, Anderson Cooper and Brian Williams pack their bags and head for the comforts of home, we can expect that their employers will put the lens caps back on the cameras, and turn our attention back to "news you can use." This, too, will be another sad outcome, another opportunity lost, in the wake of this history-reshaping disaster. ■

The tsunami has been a powerful reminder of the blinders our news media impose on our global vision.

**SUSAN J. DOUGLAS** is a professor of communications at the University of Michigan and author of *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*.



# The Fight for Our Future





# uture

By Christopher Hayes

**H**ERE'S SOMETHING TO CONSIDER: It's a concrete possibility we will wake up one morning and there won't be a single American labor union left. For 30 straight years, American organized labor has been hemorrhaging members, power and influence. [Fifty years ago, 35 percent of workers belonged to unions, today just 12 percent do (and only 9 percent in the public sector).] There are already 22 states in which "right-to-work" rules effectively outlaw collective bargaining; the National Labor Relations Board, entrusted with the sacred duty of protecting the human right to organize, has been turned into just another way station for GOP corporatist hacks; and the American manufacturing sector, once the backbone of the movement, has been eviscerated by globalization.

Faced with the possibility of permanent irrelevance, different factions of the AFL-CIO have recently been engaged in a knock-down, drag-out fight over what is to be done. Despite occasional coverage in the mainstream media, this has drawn just a smattering of attention in liberal publications and the blogosphere. But progressives everywhere need to realize that they have a powerful stake in its outcome: Without the American labor movement there is no American left, and the debate taking place right now could very well determine if the movement survives.

So for those of you who've spent the last year following electoral politics (and subsequently sitting shiva for the republic), what follows is a guide to the key points of contention, the major players and what to expect in the months to come.

## **So what's all this hubbub about the AFL-CIO possibly breaking up?**

Last summer Andy Stern, president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the largest and fastest-growing union in the AFL-CIO, threatened to leave the AFL-CIO unless the federation undertook drastic structural reforms—by merging smaller unions to form larger ones and strictly enforcing jurisdictional lines. The announcement caused a stir, not the least because it happened during the heat of the presidential election, when labor was supposed to be presenting a united front. After SEIU made its announcement, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) announced that



Andy Stern, president of SEIU, says, "Workers want their lives to be changed."

JIM WEST / ZUMA PRESS

it would leave the federation if Stern got his way, so the AFL-CIO stands to lose either SEIU or the Machinists, or—if things go badly enough—both.

### **Stern's announcement seems like it came out of nowhere; had SEIU hinted before that it was dissatisfied with the AFL-CIO?**

Yes. The current dissension actually began back in 2003 when, as reported in these pages by David Moberg, the heads of five unions (including Stern) formed the New Unity Partnership (NUP) (see "Organize, Strategize, Revitalize," February 16, 2004). The NUP argued that the union movement was dangerously close to extinction, and needed to make drastic changes. In a strategy memo leaked to the press, the NUP envisioned a labor movement radically altered in structure. As in the trade-union system in Europe, they proposed that each union "be assigned a unique occupation and/or and industry sector(s) to concentrate its growth efforts." The NUP called for the AFL-CIO to sharply focus its efforts on "strategic growth," and called on unions to devote 77 percent of their resources to recruiting new members.

### **How did the labor movement react to the NUP proposal?**

While some hailed the NUP for its bold leadership, the proposal also triggered a

backlash. Labor leaders didn't take too kindly to five union presidents appointing themselves as labor's saviors. Steelworkers President Leo Gerard, who derided them as "five guys sitting around and talking," said, "They don't represent the labor movement."

In general, people had a hard time figuring out what exactly the five union heads—Stern, Doug McCarron of the Carpenters, Bruce Raynor of the textile workers (UNITE), John Wilhelm of the hotel workers (HERE) and Terrence O'Sullivan of the Laborers—had in common. They weren't all the biggest unions, they weren't in the same industry and they didn't share the same politics: While Stern ended up endorsing Howard Dean, McCarron gave his support to Bush. Stern said they were all "radicals about growth," but many saw it as an alliance of convenience designed to unseat AFL-CIO President John Sweeney and seize the reins of the federation.

But whatever unions thought about the merits of NUP's proposal, it lit a fire under a labor movement that desperately needed it, and set the terms for much of the current debate about structural reform of the AFL-CIO.

### **What's happening now?**

In November, Sweeney sent a letter to all of the federation's affiliates, requesting they submit a list of issues they felt must be addressed, as well as proposals for reform. So far, about a dozen unions have sent responses, with many

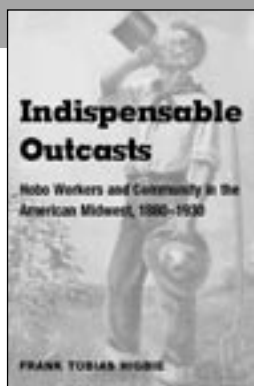
more on the way. Both SEIU ([unitetowin.org](http://unitetowin.org)) and the AFL-CIO ([workingfamilies.com/aboutaflcio/ourfuture](http://workingfamilies.com/aboutaflcio/ourfuture)) have posted these proposals on their Web sites along with commentary from union members.

What was once just a debate about the pros and cons of the NUP platform has now morphed into a tangled landscape of proposals, alliances and rivalries (see below). The NUP has officially been disbanded because, Stern says, "We all don't agree on our proposals." This all comes in the lead-up to the AFL-CIO's quadrennial convention, which will take place in Chicago in July. There have been whispers for some time that someone from the NUP coalition would challenge Sweeney for the presidency, but as of yet, no one has declared his candidacy. (For a while, Wilhem, co-president of the recently merged UNITE HERE, was rumored to be the guy, but he recently denied he'd run.)

### **So what does SEIU want to see happen?**

The agenda is spelled out most precisely in SEIU's 10-point plan "Unite to Win." It features a number of suggestions that are fairly non-controversial: The labor movement should launch a campaign to unionize Wal-Mart, it should focus political energy on resuscitating enforcement of statutes that protect the right to organize, and it must build strength in regions of the country historically hostile to organized labor.

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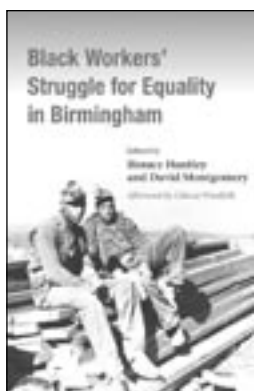
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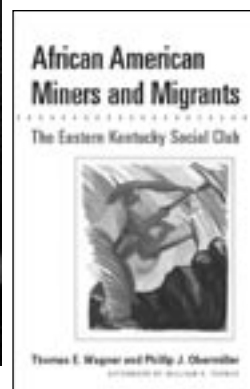
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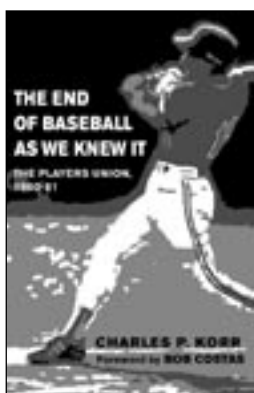
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The signature proposal—inherited from the NUP, and also the most controversial—is to drastically reduce the total number of unions (from the current 58 to about 15) and to organize each of these new mega-unions around a single industry or sector. It's not a new idea. Once upon a time, Teamsters drove trucks, United Auto Workers built cars and Steelworkers worked with steel. Today Teamsters are truck drivers, but they're also bakers and industrial printers. Social workers in Chicago belong to the UAW and the majority of the Steelworkers don't work with steel. This creeping "general unionism" is largely a result of the fact that as the unionized workforce has shrunk and the legal protections have been eviscerated, unions have sought to bolster their sagging numbers through mergers with other unions outside their core sectors and organizing campaigns in far-flung fields.

"Frankly, there is no rational process here," says University of Illinois at Chicago's

Bob Bruno, associate professor at the Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations. "Everybody's going after everyone. If you breathe and you have a job, then we'll organize you and that hasn't proven to be a very efficient way of doing things. It hasn't built power and it certainly hasn't raised class consciousness."

Stern and others think this diffusion of worker power across various institutions, particularly within a given trade, makes it impossible to leverage industry-wide power to properly fight today's massive global corporations. Stern points to the current labor crisis in the airline industry where unions representing pilots, flight attendants and machinists are often pitted against each other to "vote in contradiction to interests of the other workers to cut pensions." Stern notes that "under the current system there's no way for workers to fight back together unless the institutions they belong to are willing to band together."

In addition to competition during contract negotiations, unions are also competing to organize the same pools of workers, particularly in the fast-growing healthcare sector, where more than 30 unions are active. SEIU notes, "In 13 of the 15 major sectors of the economy there are at least four significant unions, and in nine of those sectors there are at least six unions."

SEIU itself has reorganized, replacing metropolitan locals with members from disparate trades with regional locals composed of members from a single industry. The union has had success leveraging this collective power within an industry to reach a kind of density "tipping point," after which they're able to secure representation for a large number of workers. And, as they never fail to point out, with 800,000 new members in the past eight years, SEIU is the nation's fastest-growing union, so they must be doing something right.

## What does the AFL-CIO do, anyway?

**IN SOME WAYS**, that's exactly the question a lot of people seem to be asking. Here's the short answer: The AFL-CIO works to coordinate the activities and the leverage the collective strength of its affiliates in three main areas—organizing, lobbying and politics.

Perhaps the thing the AFL-CIO does best these days is mobilize its members to vote. Under Sweeney and the federation's former political director Steven Rosenthal (who subsequently founded America Coming Together), the AFL-CIO has been tremendously successful in increasing turnout among voters in union households through coordinated worker-to-worker contact. In fact, in the last three presidential elections, even as the percentage of unionized households has shrunk, the percentage of voters from unionized households has increased. In addition to this kind of political activity, the AFL-CIO also donates a substantial amount of money to campaigns. Money, the



federation hastens to note, that comes from volunteer contributions by its members.

The AFL-CIO also lobbies at both the state and national level for worker-friendly legislation. Here its success has been more limited. Two years ago it lost a very public fight over whether Department of Homeland Security workers would be allowed to join a union. With Republicans now in control of both houses of Congress, pro-worker legislation is not exactly on the horizon.

Organizing is the final area of focus, and a relatively new one. In 1996, John Sweeney, then president of SEIU, was elected to lead the AFL-CIO on a plat-

form that argued the federation's chief function should be to facilitate organizing by its affiliates. Under Sweeney, the AFL-CIO has diverted more resources to organizing, and it established the Organizing Institute

and Union Summer to train the next generation of labor organizers. While many view these changes as welcome, they clearly haven't succeeded in growing the movement fast enough. Union density has decreased under Sweeney at about the same rate as his predecessor.

On top of these major functions, the AFL-CIO also enforces (or tries to enforce) jurisdictional boundaries so that unions don't "poach" each other's workers. There's near unanimous agreement that in this area, the AFL-CIO has been a miserable failure, and that's the issue most likely to be ad-

ressed at the convention this summer.

One thing to keep in mind: The merger between the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations that founded the AFL-CIO in 1955 wasn't easy to pull off. With unions in both bodies wary about ceding power or autonomy, it was created as a kind of loose federation—more like the United Nations than the United States—and to this day it has retained that essential feature. The organization has taken some heat in the last year, but blaming John Sweeney for problems in the labor movement is a little like blaming Kofi Annan for not stopping the Iraq War. Like Annan, Sweeney is essentially a mediator between the competing interests of the affiliate unions. A key issue to watch for this summer is whether AFL-CIO emerges with stronger centralized authority.

—Christopher Hayes

## That sounds like it makes sense. Why is it so controversial?


Well for one thing, fewer unions mean fewer union presidents, and leaders aren't about to merge themselves out of a job. More substantively, it's unclear just who gets to decide which unions merge. The idea of arranged marriages isn't very popular. American Federation of Teachers President Edward J. McElroy put it this way in an interview with *Business Week*: "Making decisions about mergers is a democratic process that deals with members of unions. For any organization, the AFL-CIO or individual unions, to point a finger and say, 'This union or that should merge,' strikes me as totally antidemocratic. Those are the kinds of decisions individual workers should make. To say to those people, 'This union is not functioning the way we think it should be,' that isn't right."

You'll notice that McElroy used the phrase "antidemocratic," which, if you start reading the literature of SEIU critics, is one of the most common complaints. Those who have taken up the mantle of "union democracy" argue that SEIU's approach, both in its own practices and in what it's proposing, is top-down, technocratic and fundamentally inimical to the values of bottom-up representation that the labor movement should embody. They ridicule Stern for wanting to mirror the structures of the very corporations the movement is fighting (which Stern himself says is one of his aims), where directives are issued by executives and passed down the hierarchy to those at the bottom.

At a conference at Queens College last year, Gregory Junemann, President of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE), a small, specialized union that would cease to exist under SEIU's proposal, offered this thinly veiled critique of SEIU and its agenda: "My members are not chess pieces to be maneuvered, nor marionettes waiting to be mobilized. These are real people, and it's their union."

Stern says the rank and file has voted for every strategic move SEIU has pursued, but critics point out that members at locals in San Francisco and Rhode Island started decertification drives after controversial mergers backed by the International were pushed through.

In a response to a reference to "union democracy," Stern posted the following to the SEIU's blog:



**Gerald McEntee, president of AFSCME, says, "Andy put his foot in his mouth, and that was a mistake."**

GREG WHITESELL / UPI

Workers want their lives to be changed. They want strength and a voice, not some purist, intellectual, historical, mythical democracy. Workers can win when they are united, and leaders who stand in the way of change screaming "democracy" are failing to understand how workers exercise the limited power they have in a country where only 8.2 percent of the private sector are in unions.

It's rhetoric like this that pisses a lot of people off. Gerald McEntee, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), who has a legendary beef with Stern, says "Andy put his foot in his mouth [when he spoke about AFL-CIO reform during the Democratic National Convention last summer], and I thought it was a disgrace." Stern generally tends to inspire strong feelings among both supporters and critics. A typical anti-Stern tract on the web is titled "Why the SEIU's Andy Stern is Full of Shit."

### So what do the unions who disagree with Stern say should be done?

It varies. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) recommends setting up voluntary coalition bodies that can serve the purpose of industry-wide organizing while avoiding forced mergers. The Machinists say the AFL-CIO should start its own TV network to get labor's message out,

and create a centralized database of health claims to drive down costs. The Communications Workers of America (CWA) focuses its platform on making unions more responsive to their current members, increasing training for shop stewards and increasing strike capacity by providing more funds to pay striking workers (something the Steelworkers also endorse).

CWA organizer and writer Steve Early, who has probably been one of Stern's most vocal critics, maintains that only by reinvigorating participation and militancy at the local level can the movement grow. In other words, where Stern argues that rapid growth is a necessary precondition for meaningful union democracy, Early argues that meaningful union democracy is a necessary precondition for rapid growth.

AFSCME, on the other hand, takes the position that becoming more politically effective is the key to reviving the movement. "Whether you do mergers or not, whether you reassert jurisdictional lines or not, whether you have 15 or 50 members of the Executive Committee, those things are important," says Paul Booth, an assistant to the union's president, Gerald McEntee. "But they don't make as much of a difference as winning or losing in politics makes." AFSCME wants the AFL-CIO to focus its efforts on the one thing it's been undeniably successful at: political mobilization of its members. Under Sweeney, labor has increased turnout of union

household voters in each of the last three presidential elections.

What's clear is that while NUP and SEIU have successfully initiated and framed the debate, one that even critics such as Booth call "healthy, stimulating, appropriate and welcome," they no longer own it.

### What happens next?

In mid-February and early March, the AFL-CIO Executive Council will discuss the various proposals. In the spring, they are expected to issue recommendations, which will likely be voted on at the convention in July.

What's going to happen at the convention is anybody's guess. Sweeney says he's "looking at the issues that are common in a number of these reports as potential areas where we could start early to build a consensus." (In a 15-minute interview, Sweeney, who has the unenviable job of refereeing the impending fracas, used the word "consensus" almost a dozen times.) There are some basic agreements. The parts of the AFL-CIO constitution that are designed to enforce jurisdiction and stop unions from poaching each other's workers are totally dysfunctional, and it is generally agreed that the AFL-CIO needs to focus its mission and play fewer roles better.

The threat of an SEIU exodus still hangs over the convention, but while many fret about the impact of a split in the house of labor, or a high-visibility, rancorous battle at the convention, the real danger is too much consensus and complacency at the cost of change. For all the enmity that the NUP and Stern have inspired, were it not for them, there would likely be no concentrated discussion about the future of the movement. Sweeney, to his credit, has lowered the temperature and quieted talk of an insurgency by moving the debate inside the AFL-CIO's tent. But while everyone pats themselves on the back for "having the debate" and builds alliances for floor votes, the original sense of urgency is slowly being lost, replaced by quibbles about the fine points of AFL-CIO bureaucracy. "It's converted from a debate about substance to a debate about something like the per capita tax," says Cornell labor professor Rick Hurd.

The worst possible outcome is one that seems increasingly likely: watered-down reform, palatable to all the parties involved. That might be the only way to keep the AFL-CIO together, but keeping the AFL-CIO together is not the point. Revitalizing the labor movement is. ■

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# HIGH-TECH HIJACK

*Corporations ramp up offshoring of IT service jobs*

BY DAVID MOBERG

**S**TEPHEN GENTRY HAD WORKED AS A PROGRAMMER FOR Boeing for 15 years before he was laid off in July 2003. His last project was training his replacements, software engineers from India. They were working in Seattle on temporary visas before returning home to do Gentry's job at Infosys, one of India's leading subcontractors of information technology (IT) services.

Eighteen months later, Gentry, 52, who earned a computer sciences degree while working as a construction worker, still hasn't found a job. "American corporations," he says, "are so greedy and cutthroat-oriented they don't care about me, you or anybody else except their bottom line."

Gentry is not alone. The offshoring of work once done by Americans is growing rapidly. Over the past few years, corporations have shifted roughly a half million business service and IT jobs, many highly skilled, to developing countries. This has kept high-tech unemployment up, driven down wages, sparked widespread job anxieties, depressed support for free trade and generated a political backlash.

Elite apologists for globalization had long assured workers that

they had a secure future with a college degree and a service job, especially anything computer-related. Now fewer Americans share the blind faith that the market will supply new and better jobs, as corporations cut costs by sending work—ranging from customer services to reading X-rays—to countries like India, where wages are often one-tenth the level in the United States.

Nobody knows precisely how many high-tech service jobs have been moved offshore. The number is still much less than the number of manufacturing jobs moved overseas, but future prospects are grim. Multinational companies are speeding up plans either to outsource more jobs to overseas contractors—including both U.S. multinationals and fast-growing foreign firms like Infosys—or to set up their own offshore service operations. IDC, a private IT research firm, predicts that IT offshoring will increase by more than 500 percent by 2007, and, according to the company's senior vice president for research, Frank Gens, China—now moving into services—"represents a wild card that could well accelerate the U.S. offshoring trend." Forrester Research predicts 3.3 million service jobs—a third of them in the highest-paying fifth of the job market—will go overseas by 2015.

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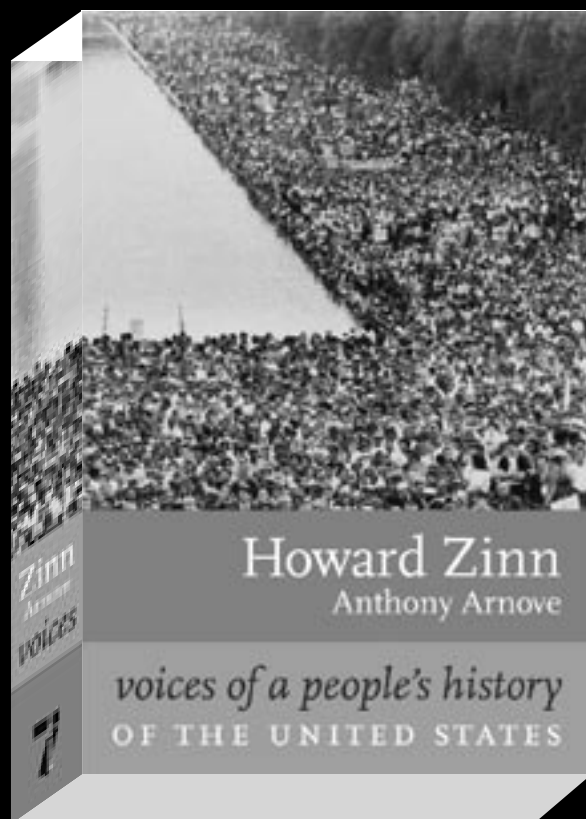
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—HOWARD ZINN



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And a University of California Berkeley study estimates that that 14 million service jobs are vulnerable.

"If you work behind a computer screen, your job is up for grabs," says Sanjay Kumar, former CEO of Computer Associates, a leading management software company.

## End of the line

Offshoring service work is the latest chapter in the history of capitalist reorganization of work. Early capitalists subdivided and routinized tasks so they could be performed by less-skilled—and lower-paid—workers. With digitization of information and standardization of software, the strategies behind dividing the manufacture of widgets can be applied to bytes of information relating to insurance claims, financial accounting, tax preparation, and hundreds of other tasks.

This new division of work meshes with two other growing trends: first, outsourcing, or subcontracting, of tasks to other companies, including even core tasks like manufacturing and design of products and, second, the shift of production overseas. Manufacturing was the first to go global, but with the expansion of high-speed

president of WashTech, an IT local of the Communications Workers, asks, "Everybody assumes they'll reinvest here, but why wouldn't they reinvest where it's cheaper?" Indeed, Philip Mattera of the Corporate Research Project reports that venture capitalists now ask IT start-up companies to present their offshoring strategy.

High-level American IT jobs are still growing. However, overall IT employment declined in recent years even after corporate IT spending rebounded. The threat of offshoring has also depressed IT wages, and college IT enrollment is dropping. Meanwhile, off-shore firms are moving higher up the services skill ladder.

## Silicon ceiling

Most new U.S. jobs, according to the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), are not steps up: They pay 21 percent less on average than job-losing industries. Six of the 10 occupations that the Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts will provide the largest number of new jobs through 2012 require no college education and typically pay low wages. Foreign investment—contrary to hype about "insourcing" of jobs to the United States—is no solution. Foreign investors have mainly acquired existing U.S. companies, according to EPI, result-

ing in a net loss of jobs and a rising trade deficit, while generating a measly 25,000 jobs a year from new enterprises. And stirring up a hornet's nest among economists, Nobel Prize winner Paul Samuelson last summer pointed out that

the U.S. economy could end up losing, not winning, from expanded free trade if low-wage foreign competitors drive down the price of products where the United States theoretically has a comparative advantage. That seems increasingly possible.

What's the solution?

In the short run, legislation has been introduced at the state and federal level to restrict outsourcing of public jobs, tighten tech visa controls, increase disclosure of offshoring, ensure privacy of information and otherwise regulate offshoring of services. But such legislation, while useful, would have limited effect. Meanwhile, two Indian union leaders recently toured the United States, advocating transnational labor action to raise labor standards in India—call centers can be oppressive operations—and slow offshoring. But tech and business service workers are largely unorganized in both countries.

The U.S. government could spur new job creation by increasing scientific research funding (which Bush is cutting) and linking corporate use of federal research to investment in the United States. It could also expand trade adjustment to cover now-excluded service workers and provide all displaced workers more comprehensive education (which Bush opposes).

In the long run, however, workers and communities must win a greater voice in corporate strategic decisions through federal reform of corporate governance, shifting of more of the financial burden from displaced workers and their communities to corporations, collective bargaining and putting pressure on pension funds. Pension funds and corporate reformers should also try to reduce Wall Street's focus on short-run profits. And any national economic benefits from globalization must be shared with everyone—such as through universal health care, improved pensions and higher service sector wages—not hoarded by a tiny elite.

The crisis looming from the massive offshoring of the service industry may make these currently utopian notions politically feasible—and a matter of practical national survival. ■

'If you work behind a computer screen, your job is up for grabs,' says Sanjay Kumar, former CEO of Computer Associates.

Internet links and plummeting international telecommunication costs, the stage was set for offshoring services.

Multinational service corporations had long expected to globalize, mainly by setting up foreign branches to provide services. A few, like General Electric and American Express, began using technical and service workers in low-wage countries to cut costs for their own global operations or, later, to provide services for other companies. Now a wide range of multinationals can digitally fragment their work, outsourcing to many different worldwide suppliers in a search for the lowest cost. Consultants—many with a financial stake in outsourcing services—promoted offshoring as the wave of the future.

Over the past decade, companies in developing countries have become major offshoring players as well. Indian software companies in particular expanded by taking advantage of tens of thousands of English-speaking Indian engineers, who had worked in the United States on temporary visas, to develop a skilled workforce and knowledge of American business. Their reputation for good, cheap work was boosted by the surge of contracts to fix Y2K software problems. Meanwhile, Indian universities have been churning out thousands of graduates, and the government relaxed controls on foreign businesses and service exporters.

## Winners and losers

Offshoring services hasn't always been as smooth or as cheap as promised, but companies have prospered. An Institute for Policy Studies/United for a Fair Economy study found that executive pay for the 50 largest outsourcers of service jobs increased dramatically in 2003 to 28 percent above the average for large-company CEOs.

But will offshoring be good for everyone else? Here's the pro-offshoring argument: Businesses that offshore jobs will save money, cut prices, expand sales, make more profit and then reinvest in new, high value-added, high-skilled jobs—if only redundant workers will just retrain themselves. But that scenario has its skeptics. Marcus Courtney,



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# The Falling DOLLAR

*The solution, not the problem*

BY DEAN BAKER

**I**N THE SAME WAY THAT MEN ARE PRONE TO BOAST about the size of certain body parts, policymakers like to tout the merits of a strong dollar. While the former is usually harmless, promoting an overvalued dollar can be an incredibly destructive economic policy. Fortunately, the United States is moving away from its high dollar days, although not quickly enough, and not before vast damage has been done.

The value of the dollar is the main force equilibrating trade, keeping the value of imports in line with exports. When the value of the dollar rises, it makes U.S. exports more expensive to foreign buyers. For example, if the dollar rises by 30 percent against the euro, it will take 30 percent more euros for someone living in France or Germany to buy a computer or some other item produced in the United States. In this sense a rise in the dollar is equivalent to putting a tariff on U.S. exports—it makes them more expensive, and thereby reduces demand for U.S. exports.

The rise in the dollar has the opposite effect on im-

ports coming into the United States. If it takes 30 percent fewer dollars to buy a euro, then items produced in Europe (e.g., German cars or French cheese) will theoretically cost 30 percent less in the United States. In this sense, a rise in the value of the dollar is equivalent to providing a subsidy for all goods imported into the United States. Therefore, the expected result of a high dollar is an increase in imports. (In reality, however, importers may not fully pass along to consumers the cost savings from a higher dollar in lower prices or the cost increases associated with a lower dollar in the form of higher prices.)

## Unpleasant consequences

The United States deliberately embarked on a high dollar policy in 1995 when Robert Rubin took over as treasury secretary. Measured against the currencies of our trading partners, the dollar rose by 30 percent between 1995 and its peak in 2002. The rise in the dollar had exactly the effect predicted by standard economic theory—exports fell, and imports rose.

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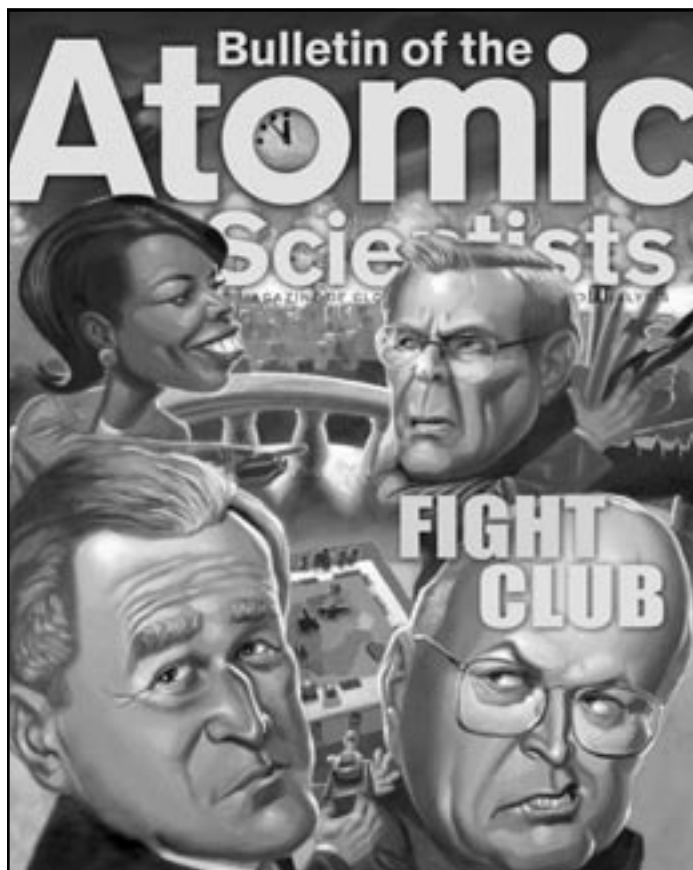
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The high dollar policy has an important class dimension. The negative impact of the high dollar is felt by the sectors of the economy that most directly face foreign competition, primarily manufacturing and therefore manufacturing workers. The United States has lost more than 2.8 million manufacturing jobs since 1995, almost one-fifth of its total, largely because of the overvalued dollar. Furthermore, the loss of millions of jobs that offer relatively high wages for workers without college degrees has placed downward pressure on the wages of less-educated workers in general. In short, the high dollar has played an important role in redistributing income from less educated workers to highly educated professionals (e.g., doctors, lawyers and economists), who are largely protected from foreign competition.

The high dollar policy lets us live beyond our means in the short term by providing us with imports at extraordinarily low prices, but we cannot indefinitely borrow money to import goods.

The high dollar has caused the U.S. trade deficit to soar to unprecedented levels. In the third quarter of 2004 the current account deficit (the broadest measure of the trade deficit, which includes international income flows like interest payments and money sent home from immigrant workers) was running at an annual rate of \$660 billion, or 5.6 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). Trade data for October and November indicate that the fourth quarter deficit will be even larger.

The current account deficit is similar to a budget deficit. The United States can run modest budget deficits (2 to 3 percent of GDP) indefinitely. It can also run large budget deficits for a short period of time, but it cannot run large budget deficits indefinitely. After a time, lenders become wary of the government's ability to repay its debt, and they demand higher interest rates on government debt, such as treasury bonds, pushing up interest rates throughout the economy.

The current account deficit is financed by foreigners buying up U.S. financial assets. In the late '90s the deficit was financed primarily by the willingness of foreign investors to buy into the stock bubble. When the stock market collapsed, many foreign investors

started buying U.S. government bonds. But in the last year and a half, they have become less willing to buy government bonds—in part because of the fear of losing money on the falling dollar. Foreign central banks, in particular the central banks of Japan and China, have picked up the slack, buying up hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of U.S. government debt in the last two years. This has temporarily sustained the value of the dollar and kept interest rates lower than they would be otherwise.

In the short term, the foreign central banks are helping support the U.S. economy, and therefore their own export markets. Without their support, the dollar would fall more sharply. This would lead to higher import prices, which would in turn lead to higher inflation as consumers and businesses are forced to spend more money

for the same goods. Higher inflation would lead to higher interest rates on home mortgages and car loans, since investors typically expect that their return on loans will provide a premium above the rate of inflation. The resulting falloff in home and car sales will bring the already weak recovery to a quick end.

In the long run, however, relying on Japan and China to finance the U.S. budget deficit creates greater problems. Japan and China are under no obligation to pay U.S. consumers to buy their products (this is the effect of their current policy of buying up U.S. government bonds). They can just as easily pay anyone else to buy their products, including their own consumers. While Japan, China and other major exporters to the U.S. cannot develop new markets overnight, they certainly can develop alternative markets in the span of a few years. When these countries become less dependent on the U.S. market, they can dump their dollars any time they find it convenient. In the meantime, these countries are accumulating almost \$2 billion a day, which may eventually be dumped on international financial markets.

It will not be pretty, but the best thing for the United States would be a quick fall

in the dollar, which would provide a rapid correction in the trade deficit, by raising the price of imports and making our exports cheaper to people living in other countries. While this rise in import prices will result in higher inflation, there is no way that an increase in import prices can be avoided. The high dollar policy lets us live beyond our means in the short term by providing us with imports at extraordinarily low prices (just like a budget deficit lets us avoid taxing enough to pay for government spending), but we cannot indefinitely borrow money to import goods. It is best to reverse this high dollar policy and let the dollar fall before we accumulate even more debt and lose even more industry to foreign competition.

### Cause vs. effect

Unfortunately, the media has largely clouded the policy debate over the dollar by confusing cause and effect. Numerous reporters have blamed the fall in the dollar on the current account deficit, which in turn is blamed on the budget deficit. While such stories rescue Robert Rubin's reputation, they defy basic economic logic.

A budget deficit is supposed to lead to a current account deficit precisely because it raises the value of the dollar. According to the textbook story, a budget deficit raises interest rates, which in turn causes foreign investors to buy U.S. financial assets (higher interest rates makes U.S. assets more attractive to foreigners). When foreigners buy U.S. financial assets, the dollar rises, leading to a current account deficit. In other words, there is no way that a budget deficit can lead to the current account deficit, except through an overvalued dollar.

In short, this is one problem that cannot be blamed on President Bush—except in his failure to take steps to correct the imbalance earlier. The Clinton administration deliberately pushed a high dollar policy that, like the stock bubble, gave Americans a short-term illusion of prosperity, making imports cheap and keeping inflation low. Just as the inflated stock prices of the tech bubble could not be sustained indefinitely, it will be impossible to sustain the overvalued dollar for long. The return to reality will be painful, but the pain will only be greater the longer it is delayed. ■

**DEAN BAKER** is co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research ([www.cepr.net](http://www.cepr.net)) and co-author of *Social Security: The Phony Crisis* (University of Chicago Press, 2000).



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# Camel Nights

Making rent in a self-righteous world

BY MICHELLE TEA

Let me tell you about my last job. ¶ I worked for a San Francisco marketing group with an office in Union Square. My boyfriend had found this job first, and was so exhilarated by the impressive pay rate and the scam-like ease of the work itself that he worked to recruit everyone around him. ¶ I'd understood long ago that my true work, writing, would never pay my rent, and so set about seeking jobs that offered maximum pay for minimum work. I worked in bookstores

where I could sneakily read new releases; answered the phones for phone sex hot-lines, using the long-distance to book DIY performance tours on my breaks; worked in offices with photocopy machines where I could xerox my zines. Late night telemarketing jobs allowed me to sleep in, as I spent my nights in bars and clubs, reading my writing, dancing and getting drunk.

Everyone I knew lived this way. While middle-class 20-somethings could always attend college to pursue a more lucrative occupation, the lower-class alternative was to not be an artist, not go to college, and in fact have nothing going on for you save a dead-end job that made other people rich and kept you working poor. I come from the lower classes, and feel incredibly lucky to have been born a creative sort.

The marketing group had a single client: Camel cigarettes. They'd approach various bars and ask them if they were interested in being paid to become "Camel bars." Camel ads hung in bathrooms, pint glasses were placed upon Camel coasters, phone numbers were written down on Camel bar napkins. If you asked the bartender for a match you'd get a book stamped with Joe Camel's phallic mug. And the final privilege the Camel money bought was the right to send its people into the bar each night to hand out free packs of Camel cigarettes to smokers.

This was my new job. For every pack of cigarettes I handed out I got one dollar. Even the slowest workers were able to rustle up or outright lie their way to fifteen packs per hour, which made the job a guaranteed \$15 an hour. And those lucrative hours were perfect—hit the bars around eight and stay as long or as





little as you like. I told my boyfriend to sign me up. I had never been paid so much. The bookstore paid \$9.50 and it had taken me five years of employment to get it up from \$7.50.

At the Union Square office I was given cartons of Camel cigarettes—menthols, lights, wides, and the various flavored sorts that come in tin boxes and have a phony art-deco aesthetic. In order to prove to the authorities that the smokers I gave freebies to were old enough to smoke (and to cull information for future marketing schemes), I was to digitally photograph the driver's license of everyone who received my smoky gifts. The mammoth cameras were outdated and confusing to operate; they malfunctioned frequently, costing workers hours of pay since without the photos we had no proof we'd worked. I was given

a big black bag to haul it all around in.

That night I showed up for training at my supervisor's home. Her house was decorated tiki-style, with bamboo wall coverings. My supervisor had the job-as-scam work ethic. She showed me the paperwork that accompanied each ID, and encouraged me to make it all up. People don't like to give out their e-mail address. She liked to make up e-mail addresses that went with the ID photos, so that the boy with the shaggy hair and thrift store eyeglasses became EmoNerd99, and the mod girl with the sleek bob VespaChick2000. I was to wear black, which sucked because my only black clothes were a pair of ratty corduroys and a mock turtleneck I kept meaning to throw away. Together we hit the bars.

**E**ACH NIGHT A FLEET OF CAMEL workers descended on neighborhood drinking holes. To start off easy we went to a place in the Mission on 24th Street. The smokers out on the street cheered when they saw me, following me inside the bar, awaiting their turns. I made my quota of 15 people in about as many minutes. "Thanks!" people shouted as I left.

On my next night I was stationed in North Beach. I lumbered around the glitzy neighborhood with my bulging pack, and wandered into Gino and Carlo's. The bar was bright and the patrons were older professional types who looked at me with a bristly curiosity. At Gino and Carlo's I shyly asked some possible smokers if they wanted free cigarettes. Unlike the broke-

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ass Mission barflys, smokers at the more upscale bars seemed to take offense at the offer of free smokes. There had to be a catch if the offer was free, right? There was. The few people who deigned to accept my offer of free cigarettes blanched when I requested to photograph their IDs. "Never mind," they'd say.

I began to feel humiliated. I was giving things away, but the work felt strangely like begging. I packed up and hiked over to Vesuvio, another fancy sort of place, but one with a literary vibe. A very drunk man in a suit asked me, quite somberly, if I would like him to take his pants off. "No thank you," I replied. He retreated.

"What are you doing over there?" inquired a gentleman sitting with some friends. There were about three of them, nattily dressed,

drinking amber glasses of whiskey. I offered up the free cigarettes, and the man made a terrible face. "Why would you do such a job?" he asked. "Working for Big Tobacco? Do you smoke cigarettes?"

I stared at him, a multitude of responses, mostly hostile, swimming in my head. "No, I don't smoke," I told him. "Then why are you doing this?" he demanded. "To pay my rent," I spat. "To buy groceries."

I wondered what this man did for a living and if he was ever called to defend his need to do it. Clearly he made a good living. I thought of my job at the bookstore. Better for the world, perhaps, but did it pay a decent wage? What about my many nonprofit jobs, doing good work, certainly, but again for low pay. Then there were the two years I worked as a full-service prostitute. The world of low-wage work is

beyond middle-class ethics of good and bad.

The man nodded his head condescendingly. "Well yes, yes," he said, "we all do need to buy groceries." He was studying me. "Would it help you if I took a pack of your cigarettes?" he asked. My cheeks burned. It would, I confirmed. "Well, then, cigarettes for all of us," he said grandly, until he realized that I needed to see his ID. My shame at having let him upset me was another layer in the sediment of humiliation that had settled around me.

I left the bar in tears. At least in prostitution the humiliation is private, I thought.

LATER THAT NIGHT MY BOYFRIEND returned from a house party one of our friends had thrown. He'd gone after work, still with his own bag of cigarettes, and at the party handed out packs to our broke, smoking friends. A drunk punk accosted him: "Get out of here with that!" he shouted. He jumped up and threw a beer can at my guy's head. "Get out of this house!" he shouted. "But you don't live here," my boyfriend said. A bunch of friends, smokers some, workers all of them, defended his right to be there. "We want free cigarettes," some said. "He's just trying to get paid," others said.

"Homeland Security!" the boy accused insanely. "You're Homeland Security!" My boyfriend sat there with the glowing digital camera. "How am I Homeland Security?" asked my queer, gender-dysphoric boyfriend who had spent the last six months frighteningly, desperately unemployed—we feared, unemployable.

"Why not travel the country," the punk suggested, "if you can't find work? Hitchhike, crash on couches."

"God!" I shrieked, hearing this story. Traveling the country costs money. Leaving your life is difficult. That boy punk made at least part of his income at a dive bar, charging low-income alcoholics money for corporate pints of Budweiser. What's the difference?

The next evening I lugged my bag to a friend's birthday dinner, intending to hit the bars after. I didn't. Depressed, I shuffled home. I didn't have it in me to defend myself to drunk people with more money and better jobs. I would return the camera and the cigarettes, keeping a single pack of Camel Lights for myself.

I had lied to the man in Vesuvio. Like so many low-wage workers in America, I tend to smoke when I'm really stressed out. ■

**MICHELLE TEA** is an award-winning San Francisco-based writer. Her latest book is the graphic novel *Rent Girl*.

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But to make up the balance, *In These Times* depends, as it has for 28 years, on readers like you who value an independent media, and contribute above and beyond the cost of their subscription. On these pages *In These Times* recognizes the people who provide the financial backing that allows this magazine to exist.

On behalf of those readers without the means to contribute; on behalf of the hundreds of writers and artists who, for very little pay, provide the editorial content; on behalf of the staff of *In These Times*, we extend our

appreciation and thanks to the more than 2,000 readers whose donations have underwritten everything you have read in this magazine in the past year. As the adage goes, freedom of the press belongs to those who own the press. *In These Times* is your press.



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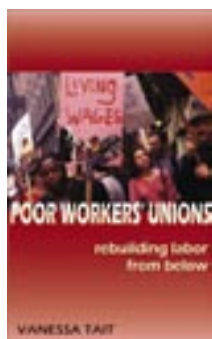
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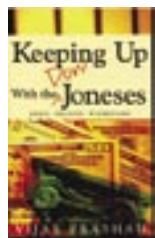
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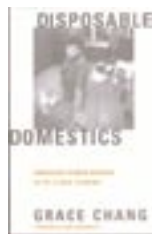
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Same-sex couples from San Francisco dance during a marriage equality rally on Capitol Hill last October.

ALEX WONG/GETTY IMAGES

BY ALLISON XANTHA MILLER

## Gay Matrimony: Get Used to It

The election was bad enough; the hand-wringing is almost worse. Democrats are in a fugue, strategizing ways to be more conspicuous churchgoers, while radical types talk bravely about moving to Canada. The feeling is particularly

acute among queers (on whom pundits started blaming the Republican victory months before it even happened). Plenty are wondering whether the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender movement pushed for same-sex marriage too fast, before the country was *ready*, including the most prominent mainstream gay lobbying group, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC). It recently asked for the resignation of its executive director and said it would adapt its tactics to be more low-key. (Curious, since HRC's tactics don't exactly include lying down in the street.)

For queers, marriage seemed for so long both an unglamorous, assimilationist goal and an utter

fantasy. Now, judging from the reactions it provokes, it seems radical and, perhaps, imminent. How did this happen? A recent book by historian George Chauncey attempts to put the debate in perspective historically. *Why Marriage?* draws on Chauncey's pathbreaking first book, *Gay New York*, as well as his work writing the Historians' Amicus Brief in the 2003 Supreme Court case *Lawrence v. Texas*, which overturned the nation's sodomy laws and was part of the reasoning behind the Massachusetts' court decision to allow same-sex marriage. Same-sex marriage, he maintains, has been floated as a possibility by successive generations of queers, from a variety of political standpoints. A kind of

“marriage” had always existed informally whenever partners lived together and were recognized by the community as a couple. (This, not church-sanctioned nuptials, was the “ancient” form of marriage.) What brought it to the fore in the ’80s was AIDS and the so-called lesbian baby boom—in other words, death and children. You could say this raised the stakes somewhat.

These experiences made gays and lesbians realize the ways in which the lack of legal recognition of their relationships interfered with some of the most intimate aspects of their lives—the ability to care for a sick partner, for instance, or the bonds between parents and chil-

book is not to make the case for gay marriage; it’s to provide historical background on the debate—which is sorely needed, since much of the contemporary animus against homosexuality presumes that such bias is upheld by centuries of precedent, especially religious precedent. But the belief that religion never changes is mistaken, Chauncey writes. Only 50 years ago, many white southerners were taught “segregationist theology”: that the Bible showed God was against race mixing. He put the races of humankind on separate continents to prevent it. He sent the floods in Noah’s time to stop it, and later destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for the same reason. Some were even taught that the serpent in the Garden of Eden was actually a black man.

These were mainstream ideas, once; today they are disavowed by most of the Christian right, including Jerry Falwell, who in the ’50s condemned school desegregation as against God’s plan. What are thought to be “ancient prejudices” are open to revision. This kind of argument devastated sodomy laws in *Lawrence*; it may do the same for marriage laws.

Another popular misperception that Chauncey explores is that marriage is a religious matter. “The religious argument against same-sex marriage ignores a fundamental historical fact about marriage in the United States: It has always been a civil matter.” The state issues a marriage license; a church may or may not choose to bless the union. “The rules established by many churches restricting who may marry whom in a religious ceremony have not, in fact, been able to prevent people from getting married.” In the eyes of the state, a couple married by the Catholic church,

say, would be just as married if they had had a properly credentialed Elvis impersonator preside at their wedding. This arrangement also allows different religions—and different denominations within religions—to maintain their own rules regarding marriage. This arrangement is called religious freedom.

Chauncey also clarifies the limits of marriage—it’s not synonymous with equality, as some of its proponents believe—and acknowledges that some in the gay community are wary of marriage, if not outright against it. Those attitudes are represented in the raucous anthology *That’s Revolting! Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*,

which dares ask whether the LGBT movement can include social justice goals such as universal health care, housing, the protection of civil liberties, the rights of immigrants and youth services. Contributors include community organizers, punks, artists, anarchists, sex workers and students. The focus is on activism; there’s no queer theory. The tone is fierce and funny, inspired as much by the spirit of Seattle as Stonewall.

Only a few of the pieces in *That’s Revolting!* deal specifically with marriage; the writers train their sights on something more ambitious: assimilation into the mainstream. As editor Mattilda

*Continued on page 45*

### **That’s Revolting! Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation**

Edited by Mattilda, a.k.a. Matt Bernstein Sycamore  
Soft Skull Press  
320 pages, \$16.95

### **Why Marriage? The History Shaping Today’s Debate over Gay Equality**

By George Chauncey  
Basic Books  
200 pages, \$22

dren. Those with exceptional foresight and enough money learned how to navigate the bureaucratic nightmare of powers of attorney and other sorts of legal documentation. “A full set of the documents necessary to approximate the protections provided by marriage could cost several thousand dollars,” Chauncey writes, “a marriage license might cost \$25. ... And given the expense of other legal documents, marriage was the only way many poorer couples could afford such protections at all.”

But the point of Chauncey’s

## **ART SPACE**



Anthony Papa’s book, *15 to Life: How I Painted My Way to Freedom*, tells the story of this prisoner turned artist and activist and his personal triumph, through the power of art, over justice gone wrong. See more at [www.15tolife.com](http://www.15tolife.com).

BY PAT AUFDERHEIDE

# Copywrongs

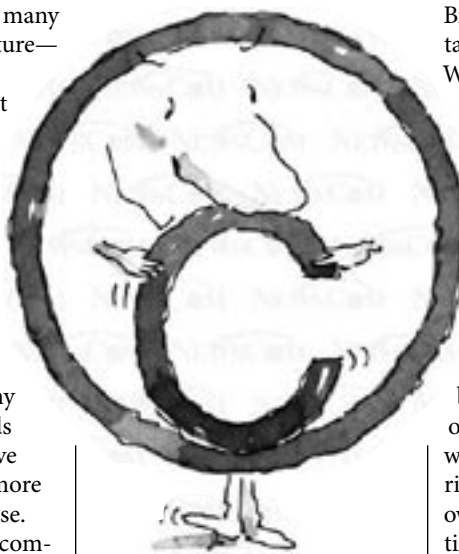
Budding filmmaker Jonathan Caouette spent \$218 to make a movie on his Macintosh about his dysfunctional family, *Tarnation*. It went to Cannes and was released in theaters. But because the film interwove

images of his family with many references to popular culture—each of which had to be cleared with the copyright owners—the film ended up costing \$400,000.

Getting a copy of *Eyes on the Prize*, the classic documentary series on the civil rights movement, has turned into an eBay hunt for librarians. Why? Because rights to the many quoted images and sounds in the historical series have expired, and would cost more than \$500,000 to re-license. The series is no longer in commercial distribution.

Veteran filmmaker David Van Taylor spent months following one-time Contragate schemer Ollie North on a political campaign for his film *A Perfect Candidate*. At one stop, he caught North surveying the crowd singing and swaying along to a singer intoning, “God Bless America.” He had to pay the Irving Berlin estate to use the song.

These are only three examples of the outrageous consequences of today’s interpretation of copyright law discovered in a study just completed at American University, “Untold Stories: The Creative Consequences of the Rights Clearance



Culture.” They testify to the fact that unbalanced interpretation of copyright leads to a creative stranglehold.

Filmmakers must pay a license to use a pop song that may play in the background in a pizza parlor, an image or sequence from a movie or archival footage owned by someone else. They may need to pay not only songwriters but performers, not only movie studios but actors. There is no central place to find out who owns what. There is no rule of thumb for pricing. No one has to agree to license. And it doesn’t matter if you didn’t intend to quote it. Did somebody sing “Happy

Birthday” in your documentary? Too bad—you owe Time Warner a small fortune.

A system that has a logic—it’s fair to pay others to use their work—is spinning out of control. The copyright stranglehold has been tightening over the last decade, as media consolidation has also consolidated control over film and photo archives. It has also been driven by big media companies’ fear of digital copying. Copyright, which has always contained rights for users as well as for owners, has increasingly been tilted toward the rights of owners. Rights of users, such as “fair use,” are getting harder and harder to claim. (“Fair use” is guided by one general concept: Do the public cultural benefits of the use outweigh the private economic costs?)

The copyright creative stranglehold may be strongest where it is hardest to see: on the imagination itself. The strictures of copyright clearance today make documentarians avoid social criticism, cultural commentary, historical films, satire and parody.

“The biggest problem is self-censorship,” says filmmaker Jeffrey Tuchman, who regularly works for the major cable networks. “You don’t try what’s not

possible.”

What’s not possible is decided by the people who show documentarians’ work—mostly broadcasters. They avoid the very whiff of litigation, even frivolous litigation. And so balancing features of the copyright law, like fair use, simply are ruled out.

At the same time, some filmmakers are fighting for their rights, including the right to fair use. For instance, Robert Greenwald successfully asserted his right to quote Fox News without license fees in his documentary *Outfoxed*.

The problems faced by filmmakers are also faced by book authors, musicians and other artists. But because documentarians both want copyright (as a protection for their own work) and also need to quote other people’s work, they have ended up, unsuspectingly, on the front lines of a wide-ranging battle for the right to quote and comment on our own culture.

Documentarians now have a chance to become part of the solution. If filmmakers can collectively say what their “best practices” are—that is, what is within the law and equitable—in employing fair use, such a statement could become a powerful negotiating tool for more liberal interpretations of copyright law.

Artists who understand copyright law better—especially its balancing features—have more creative freedom. More education of creators and gatekeepers is critical. ■

*This article is drawn from the report “Untold Stories,” co-written by Pat Aufderheide and Peter Jaszi at American University. The full report is available at [www.centerfor-socialmedia.org/rock/index.htm](http://www.centerfor-socialmedia.org/rock/index.htm). E-mail your address to [socialmedia@american.edu](mailto:socialmedia@american.edu) for a free DVD that includes a film on copyright and the study.*



# Gay Marriage

Continued from page 43

explains in the introduction, this has enabled some gays and lesbians to live complacently ensconced in gentrified urban enclaves, where they fight like hell to maintain the boundaries of their privilege: "Gay landlords evict people with AIDS to increase property values; gay bar owners arrest homeless queers so they don't get in the way of business; and gay political consultants ensure the election of pro-development, anti-poor candidates who ensure that the ruling class not only remains in power but systematically sucks the poor dry."

This argument assumes that in the past gays and lesbians were more radical critics of mainstream American culture. It's hard to prove something like this, and the writers in this collection don't pretend to try to. But it does *seem* true, especially since the ebbing of AIDS activism among white gay men after the introduction of antiretroviral drugs in the mid-90s. The election of Bill Clinton also seemed to gradually sap much of the community's adversarial attitude. In addition, the fight for universal health care, so central to the discourse of AIDS activism, seemed virtually abandoned after Clinton's modest proposals went down in flames in 1994.

Yet radicals did persist. *That's Revolting!* reads like a patchwork alternative history of the gay '90s and 2000s: the part queers played in the anti-globalization movement, their responses to racist "quality of life" policing, how they coped with welfare reform and the withering of social services and their valiant efforts to banish tacky corporate sponsorship from gay pride parades. The essays and interviews generally show a sophisticated understanding of how such impersonal forces as economics affect life on the ground for ordinary members of the LGBT community. It's ironic that they denounce assimilation at the same time that they demonstrate the web of ties between the community and the larger world, and forge connections across boundaries of race, ethnicity, gender identity and class.

It's also ironic that part of resisting assimilation has to be essentially conservative—that is, preserving gay culture as it is. Forget for a moment that this is

impossible, that gay culture, like everything else, is subject to the forces of time. Forget too that it was created as a refuge against oppression. The radical heritage of gay culture is real, and it is worth preserving to whatever extent possible.

But this isn't really the kind of strategy *That's Revolting!* offers. Assimilation seems to boil down to individual actions and personal decisions: working a corporate job, having kids, buying Diesel jeans, appearing in a sitcom; it's not dealt with as a demographic inevitability of millions of people coming out over the past thirty years, a relatively brief period of time historically speaking. The more people who come out, the less "alternative" the lifestyle becomes. If your family accepts you as gay, you are less likely to experience the degradation in living conditions you would likely suffer were they to, say, kick you out of the house. If your employer has a nondiscrimination policy, you may never experience the fear of being fired if anyone at work finds out you're gay. And if you do not have to give up any class privileges to be openly gay, you may not think you have anything in common with those who do.

Chauncey suggests another way of seeing assimilation, based on recent theories of ethnicity, which "recognize that even as immigrants were reshaped by their incorporation into American culture, so too was American culture." As annoying as the marriage movement can be—its squeaky-clean poster children, its romantic sentimentality, its denial of genderqueers—the process of trying to change marriage laws is having a radical impact on American society. Although the aspect of heterosexual privilege that marriage advocates target is extremely specific, it is also profoundly consequential. It is perhaps the most obvious boundary separating straight from queer, and as such is taken by many as a profound threat to heterosexual identity. Yet marriage advocates didn't start this process; challenges to heterosexual privilege have been driven for the past 30 years by those willing to put their bodies on the line to fight homophobia and trans-phobia. And they're not going away. ■

**ALLISON XANTHA MILLER** writes about American history and culture. She lives in New York City.

## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



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BY KURT VONNEGUT

# 1844 A.D.

When Karl Marx in 1844 wrote,  
"Religion is the opium of the people,"  
he no more dreamt of a Stalin or a Castro  
than Jesus,  
when he said,  
"The meek shall inherit the Earth,"  
had dreamt  
of the Spanish Inquisition or the Neocons.

Get a load of this:

In 1844, our God-fearing nation  
had made it perfectly legal  
for its citizens to buy and sell African men,

women and children!  
Some God that was!

In 1844, opium was the only  
effective killer of really awful pain.  
Karl Marx had used it,  
and, as you or I would have been,  
he was grateful for opium's analgesia.  
He saw that religion could also  
be a comfort  
for the downtrodden, "the meek,"  
for whom he wished much better times,  
a living wage, free education  
and so on.  
So, on their behalf, he was grateful for,  
not scornful of, religion's analgesia,  
however insubstantial.

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**The Sorrows of Empire:  
Militarism, Secrecy and  
the End of the Republic**  
By Chalmers Johnson

Americans have long believed that the very notion of empire is an offense against our democratic heritage, yet in recent months, these two words—American empire—have been on everyone’s lips. At this moment of unprecedented economic and military strength, the leaders of the United States have embraced imperial ambitions openly. How did we get to this point? And what lies down the road?

Among Chalmers Johnson’s provocative conclusions is that American militarism is putting an end to the age of globalization and bankrupting the United States, even as it creates the conditions for a new century of virulent blowback. *The Sorrows of Empire* suggests that the former American republic has already crossed its Rubicon—with the Pentagon leading the way.

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